

INTRODUCTION

“No one is allowed to punish you in a cruel or harmful way.” — *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC, 1989, Article 37)

Juvenile delinquency remains a multifaceted and enduring global concern with significant social, psychological, and developmental implications for children, families, and communities. While definitions vary, most converge on behaviors characterized by repeated violation of law, antisocial conduct, and persistent disobedience that require formal intervention by juvenile justice authorities. The issue is not only legal but also deeply sociological—reflecting structural inequalities, environmental risk factors, and gaps in protective systems that expose children to conflict with the law.

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) provides a universal normative framework emphasizing the protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration of children rather than punitive responses. However, no single international law governs juvenile delinquency, and implementation remains subject to national sovereignty, cultural norms, and differing moral and legal traditions. This divergence underscores an enduring debate: should juvenile justice primarily safeguard the sovereign authority of the state or the inherent human rights of the child?

One of the most debated aspects of juvenile justice is the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR). The UN defines a child as any person below 18 years of age and urges States Parties to establish a minimum age of at least 12 years, with encouragement to raise it higher where possible. Despite this guidance, MACR varies widely across jurisdictions—from as low as 7–9 years in some Asian, Middle Eastern, and African countries to 16–18 years in several European and Latin American states. Even within federal systems, disparities persist, as seen in the United States where MACR ranges between 6 and 12 across states. These variations reflect not only legal interpretations of culpability but also societal perceptions of childhood, accountability, and the role of justice systems in shaping rehabilitation versus punishment.

Global profiles and risk patterns reveal that juvenile offending is predominantly urban and often occurs in group contexts. Male children are more likely to engage in both property and violent offenses, with age-specific trends: vandalism tends to peak around ages 14–15, property crimes at 16–17, and violent crimes at 18–20 (Junger-Tas, 1996). Many of these children come from environments characterized by poverty, disrupted family structures, neglect, exposure to violence, and limited access to education and social support. Mental health disorders, learning difficulties, and histories of abuse or trauma further exacerbate vulnerability. Notably, research suggests that a majority of children commit offenses only once, and that rights-based, developmentally informed diversion and rehabilitation programs can effectively prevent recidivism (Bergeron, 2013; UNICEF, 2000).

Consequently, addressing juvenile delinquency requires an integrated and context-sensitive approach that transcends punitive measures. It calls for systems that uphold the *best interests of the child*—anchored on rehabilitation, reintegration, and community participation as envisioned by the UNCRC and aligned with restorative justice principles. These global concerns form the conceptual backdrop of this study, which situates the issue of *Children in Conflict with the Law* (CICL) within the Philippine context, particularly in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), where questions about the

adequacy of rehabilitation and reintegration mechanisms remain critical for both social welfare and community development.

METHODOLOGY

This study was exploratory and descriptive in nature as it aimed to determine the current life status of former RRYC clients. It is therefore a qualitative research that specifically used the case study format as it attempts to portray the journey of former children in conflict with the law. This included their challenges and unique life stories as they reintegrate themselves to normal life in society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study sums the following findings of the study as guided by the problem objectives initially posed.

1. In terms of the profile of the CICL clients served at the Regional Rehabilitation Center -CAR, the following features were uncovered:

a. The CICL clients are all males aged from 15 years old, at the time of offense, to 17 years old. Given by the process of commonly being detained at jail while waiting for the court decision, most of the boys were a year older or more by the time they were transferred at the RRCY. As of the length of stay, some stayed for as short as one year while others took as long as three years. By the time they were released for reintegration, they were mostly above 18 years old. Hence in general, the CICLs tend to spend their transition from teenagers to young adults in rehabilitation.

b. The educational background mostly revealed high school level of education although a greater number were unspecified due to lack of records. The lowest educational attainment was Grade 3 and the highest was a high School Graduate.

c. The Crimes Committed mostly are sex related offences. This included rape and acts of lasciviousness. Followed by property and poverty related offences such as theft and robbery. Most of the offences have been committed with peers or influenced by the “barkada”.

2. There were several challenges and coping mechanisms encountered by the CICL clients during their rehabilitation in the RRCY. It ranged from milder but perennial concerns such as water shortage especially during summer to more serious cases of substance withdrawal and trauma from jail detention. Likewise, homesickness is commonly experienced but overcome in time. Some coping mechanism entails the CICLs personal abilities whereas some challenges need the center staffs’ intervention. The growing number of intakes was also mentioned by the respondents and center staff. Overall, the respondents were highly content and usually grateful as to the services and programs delivered at the RRCY.

3. As to the degree of personal rehabilitation experienced among CICL clients since being released from the RRYC –CAR, most of them claim to be highly transformed and indeed rehabilitated. Changes manifested included cessation of old vices and turning away from former peers of bad influence. Most of the respondents likewise returned back to a productive community life as students, working students or fulltime labor. However, constant follow is still needed to ensure non-recidivism.

4. As to the degree of community reintegration among CICL clients after being released from the RRYC –CAR, the survey indicated a moderate level of reintegration. Mitigating factors included the family and community attitude towards them as former offenders. Stigma is still manifested from outright rejection of own families and being banned from returning to their previous communities to relocation of residence by the victim's family for fear of the CICL. Likewise, reintegration protocol is not followed by one client which signify defiance and other potential risks.

5. Community-based Reintegration programs availed of by the CICL were observed to be very minimal. After care services was limited to scholarships which were actually granted prior to the release of the CICL.

Progress Reports from the supervising social worker were also scant due to claims of personnel, turn over and nonappearance of the CICL on trial reintegration. Moreover, reintegration programs on the barangay level is barely noticed.

6. Several challenges and coping mechanisms were encountered by the CICL during their reintegration with their families and the mainstream society which varied from stigma to rejection. Same old family problems and community triggers were likewise dealt by the CICL upon returning from rehabilitation which may tempt the CICL to recede back to old habits. Some coping patterns included a low-key social living to self-independence living as a way of moving forward.

7. As to the community Perceptions and Attitudes towards CICL in general, the following details were uncovered.

a. On the Impressions of CICL as a threat to society, more than half of the respondents (51.2 %) perceive the CICLs to be Moderately Dangerous. Compared to national stigmatizing sentiments, Cordilleran communities seem to have a more reasonable gauge of tolerance towards the CICLs.

b. On the level of acceptance after rehabilitation, the majority of respondents show a moderate level of acceptance at 65.1%. This validates results for the previous question - perception of threat to society.

c. As to Opinion on CICL related issues, majority of respondents (51.9%) agreed to the said proposal by lawmakers of lowering the MARC -minimum age of criminal liability below 15. On the court treatment /litigation of CICL as adult

criminals, there is a very narrow consensus between those who favor (42.5%) and those who don't (41.5%) consent to such treatment.

d. Suggestions and recommendations abound in terms of CICL Crimes Prevention Program as well as CICL Reintegration Programs. Key themes identified were family values, support and therapy as well as external source of influences like peers and community conditions. Institutional interventions in schools, community churches and people's organizations were also identified. Likewise, government programs down to the community level were mentioned as key platforms for CICL crime prevention to diversion and rehabilitation. Overall, major mitigating themes points to Poverty alleviation programs as well as youth development along with family strengthening programs from national to community level platforms were mentioned as needed measures to address CICL issues.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions stated, the study hereby recommends the following measures:

1. The profile of the CICL in the Cordillera region needs to be more accurately drawn with the aid of a systematized and consolidated data or registry from the RRCY, Local and Regional Offices concerned. Local trends need to be further established as to the nature and severity of youth offending so as to aid in establishing relevant intervention, diversion and rehabilitation programs and policies unique for the whole region.

2. To ensure sustained rehabilitation constant monitoring is still needed especially for the high-risk cases. Home visits must also be done on special cases where the family was identified as the proximate cause of child truancy. Family therapy sessions or equivalence activities are needed. In the event of nonappearance at the due reporting dates, something must be done to ensure strict compliance of the release order or consequence thereof. For the families of the victims, Rule 94 of the RA 10630 stipulates provisions for intervention programs needed. As stated: "The JJWC, thru the appropriate agencies shall issue the necessary guidelines for the provision of assistance and intervention to victims and their families....in all stages of the process of resolving the effects of the offense committed by the CICL, the LSWDO shall ensure that the needs of the victims are properly addressed."

3. The participation of the other stakeholders must be mobilized especially at the barangay level where prevention programs can be formulated for the youth –OSY. Strengthening Youth development programs and facilities at the community level is a good start at mitigating and pro acting juvenile delinquencies. Given the limited

resources as perennially expressed, initiatives to tap sponsors locally or even foreign sources can go a long way to save the youth from street life and criminal tendencies. More sensitive Policy interventions should be in place. Lowering the minimum age of criminal accountability still depicts a stigmatizing and punitive approach to juvenile delinquency and children in general.

4. Addressing juvenile delinquency and its damages to families and communities need a multi-scope approach. Prevention on the level of families can go a long way. Family well-being programs can be conceived and anchored along the goals, Missions and vision of the Juvenile Justice Law. Likewise, in a more retroactive sense, more active support for the youth can be maximized on all venues possible, from the barangays to schools. More active advocacies on the rights of the child on all institutional platforms also help mitigate the stigma of youth offending. As such all stakeholders must do their share in supporting the provisions of the Juvenile Justice Law.

5. Give the challenges and coping mechanisms of CICLs, post rehabilitation support programs are recommended to ensure that the rehabilitation process undergone was not in vain. Anti-recidivism program from community levels to civic groups must be established. Using these former CICLs to advocate juvenile crime prevention and truancy can be more potent as it sets concrete role modeling for the young people.